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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SUVA 000552

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [FJ](#)
SUBJECT: FIJI UPDATE 12/8: FOR SHORT TERM, DE FACTO COUP;
FUTURE LESS CLEAR; ELECTIONS A FEW YEARS AWAY; REQUEST FOR
CONTINUED INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

REF: SUVA 549 (AND PREVIOUS)

Classified By: Amb. Dinger. Sec. 1.4 (B,D).

Summary

1. (C) Fiji Vice President Madraiwiwi and Prime Minister Qarase both have acknowledged that Bainimarama's coup has succeeded for the immediate future, though neither has resigned. With significant players, including many in the ethnic-Fijian community, very unhappy about that result, a "crunch time" may still come in Fiji time, a while from now. Observers await revelations about who Bainimarama's shadowy backers have been. Madraiwiwi has pleaded for international pressure to continue to demonstrate that the world "will not tolerate or condone" what has happened. It appears the RFMF doesn't plan elections anytime soon. End summary.

VP: tacit acceptance of coup; but crunch time ahead

2. (C) In a conversation today, Vice President Madraiwiwi told us he expects Bainimarama and the RFMF to continue a "gradual consolidation" of the coup. He sees a "tacit acceptance" of the reality of military control, though a real question remains about how much support the coup has in the community. Madraiwiwi predicts "a crunch time will come" about whether the RFMF can sustain itself in power. People are "biding their time; these things take time" in Fiji. He noted it took a year after the 1999 election for the uprising that removed then-PM Chaudhry; but "it may take less time this time."

Curiosity about those in the shadows

3. (C) In the meantime, Madraiwiwi added, it will be interesting to see who comes out from the shadows, including to take prominent positions in Bainimarama's interim administration. Madraiwiwi accepts blame for being naive about some whom he trusted to have sympathies for the nation's interests, rather than just for the military's. He indicated the list includes people close to President Iloilo who have taken advantage of the man's "frailty."

Time to move on

4. (C) Madraiwiwi said he holds no anger or resentment. In fact, he is relieved, though he is experiencing weariness and sadness. It is time to move forward, and he will begin work at the Howard's law firm on Monday. (Madraiwiwi's closest friend, Graham Leung, is managing partner there.) Asked whether he technically remains VP, Madraiwiwi said it would

appear so; but he is leaving the legalities of his situation to others. He expressed appreciation for the strong stance Great Council of Chiefs Chair Bokini has taken in support of the Constitution, including by affirming that only the GCC can appoint or remove a President or Vice President.

Plea for continued international pressure

¶5. (C) Madraiwiwi expressed appreciation for moves by the international community, including the United States, to press for rule of law and to impose coup sanctions. He urged the world to keep demonstrating that it "will not tolerate or condone" the RFMF's illegal removal of the government.

Qarase turning to a new direction

¶6. (U) In a media interview early this morning, PM Qarase sounded subdued. He said he is thinking of next steps for his future life, perhaps a venture into business. He said he stood his ground for "principle and democracy," and is proud of that. He figures Bainimarama's coup will be challenged in court. He asked civil servants to continue working for the people, independently of politics.

Elections down a long road...

¶7. (U) The RFMF's PM told the media today that it may take "12 months, or 2 or 3 years" for Fiji to be ready for general elections. Opposition Leader Beddoes's proposal for a government of national unity (refs), which would invoke the "doctrine of necessity" and a Qarase resignation as PM in order to put in a caretaker government made up of MPs elected in last May's elections, suggests the prospect of elections

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in March 2009.

Ganilau out of the shadows?

¶8. (U) Former RFMF Commander and former GCC head Ratu Epeli Ganilau, who has been rumored to be one of the main proponents of Bainimarama's coup, told the media today GCC Chair Bokini has asked him to mediate between the RFMF and the GCC. Ganilau said the takeover was illegal, but people must accept reality. The GCC must come to terms with the military and move on. Ganilau added that he would consider a position in the interim government. The RFMF spokesman said the military is not seeking a GCC meeting for now, wanting a "normal situation" before moving to re-appoint President Iloilo. GCC Chair Bokini informed the media he has not spoken with Ganilau and certainly has not asked him to mediate. Bokini said it will be hard to get the chiefs to meet in the current circumstances.

Chaudhry, Manuelli in the doorway?

¶9. (U) Former PM and Fiji Labor Party leader Chaudhry announced today that the FLP stands ready to help the military return Fiji to democratic rule ASAP. He reiterated that he will not personally accept a role in a caretaker government, since it would arise from an illegality. Chaudhry appealed to the diplomatic community to engage with the RFMF. Former RFMF Commander and Home Affairs Minister in the Rabuka Government Paul Manuelli has been seen frequently at the army camp and has served as an RFMF emissary to the Qarase Government at times. Asked by the media if he is part of Bainimarama's advisory council, Manuelli denied it.

The advisory council

¶10. (C) The DATT reports that Bainimarama's advisory council is to consist of three senior RFMF officers: Bainimarama; Chief of Staff Capt. (Navy) Teleni; and Land Forces Commander Col. Driti; plus a number of civilian CEOs from key ministries. RFMF Major George Langman is to be secretary. Total membership is expected to be 10-12, and the first

formal meeting is to be next Monday. Per ref A, Bainimarama announced yesterday that all CEOs are to produce reports for a meeting with the RFMF on Monday.

Chiefs, Army, troop loyalties

¶11. (U) Yesterday, the high chief of Namosi Province called for all RFMF troops from Namosi to lay down their weapons and return home. Today the chief's nephew, an RFMF Lieutenant designated as leader of Namosi troops at the camp, told the media that he and his mates unanimously decided to ignore the chief and back Bainimarama's goals, preferring army life to planting root crops in the village.

Churches remain unhappy

¶12. (U) The Fiji Council of Churches and the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji have an ad in today's Fiji Times stating they do not recognize or support the interim government which is unconstitutional. They say the coup "is a manifestation of darkness and evil." Comment: Sermons this Sunday might be interesting.

Spinning the news

¶13. (C) Former RFMF Colonel Baledrokadroka, who awaits court-martial on allegations that he attempted to stir a mutiny against Bainimarama last January, was seen at the RFMF camp yesterday. The RFMF suggested he had returned to signal support for the takeover. Our DATT reports Baledrokadroka has a different account. RFMF troops came to his house in an intimidation attempt earlier this week. Frustrated, the Colonel went to the camp to complain to Col. Driti. Baledrokadroka reports the RFMF offered him the Police Commissioner job, but he responded that he "wants no part" of what is going on. He is seeking asylum with his family in New Zealand.

Comment

¶14. (C) With PM Qarase and VP Madraiwiwi both signaling they are moving on, it appears Bainimarama can now presume he has won the short-term battle. Neither the PM nor VP has

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actually resigned, but the coup seems to have succeeded, for now. However, as Madraiwiwi suggested, memories are long in Fiji and many ethnic-Fijians are unhappy with the recent events. RFMF troops continue to barge into offices without notice or warrant; intimidation has not ended; bruising of the rule of law continues. With visa sanctions in play, we expect those who linger in the shadows behind Bainimarama, at least the savvy ones, will attempt to play coy about the interim government. As Suva moves into the weekend, the streets remain calm.

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